

GROWING STEWARDS OF GOD'S BELONGINGS



Entrusted by God and for God

Leader Prep - background

- Stewardship is a topic far bigger than we perhaps realise. It actually relates to everything in life.
- The doctrine of creation teaches us about God's place in the universe: He made everything, he owns everything, he determines how things are to be used in His universe, including us.
- The doctrine of humanity teaches us about our place in the universe: We are made in his image (Genesis 1-2) for His creation purposes. We are entrusted to rule over God's creation in worship of God the creator.
- The doctrine of sin shows us how far we have fallen from God's design: Rather than honour God with what we have been given, we use material things to pursue our own agenda. We claim the gifts received from God (including our abilities and opportunities) to be our own, pitting us against our maker. Our very vocation therefore is lost and we pursue naturally an agenda built on the belief that God is not to be honoured if blessing and life is to follow.
- The glorious gospel of Jesus awakens us to this madness and reapplies the original purposes of God in new and exciting ways. Christ offers forgiveness for our evil stewardship of our lives, and our hearts are changed to no longer trust in the possession of 'things'. Instead we pursue life where things are again the right way up and the 'things' we have been entrusted with are used for God's glory with confidence and joy.
- Because we have grown up in a 'me' and 'my stuff' western culture, the above doctrinal summary is easy to affirm, but terribly difficult for us to truly apply. It is our great blind spot. However, if the gospel is understood correctly, then this becomes an exciting area for us to pursue and grow in. If our tag line at Crossroads (Growing followers of Jesus), is to be genuine, then we will want to encourage each other to grow in this area of Biblical Stewardship.
- A steward: Someone an owner entrusts with the management of his/her assets.
- Christian stewardship: not just about money and possessions (though this is key). It will include also such things as: time, family, gifts/abilities, opportunity, employment, our bodies, our future, the Gospel.

Big Idea: This world belongs to God and so do we. We have the honour of being entrusted with His possessions for our joy and His ultimate glory.

Possible opening/s

- God created us to love people and use things for His purposes, but materialism causes us to love things and use people for our purposes. What do you like about this summary? What don't you like? Is it just the rich who do this?
- Can you think of something you have that you would treat differently if it belonged to someone else? What is it? Why does the knowledge that God owns everything not always have the same impact upon our use of 'things'?

Getting into the text –

- Read Matthew 25:14-30
 - *Note: Jesus is speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven and what entry into it will look like.*
 - What do we learn from this passage about Biblical Stewardship? (*That we are entrusted and held accountable for how we used the master's possessions*)
 - What is most shocking thing about this passage? (*It's the fact that the 3rd servant understood the 'ownership' of the master, but failed to appreciate his call to 'stewardship.'*)
 - The character of the master moves the servants through fear. How should we be moved in view of the gospel?

(You may wish to divide your group in two for the sake of time and feed back your findings together in terms of what we have learnt about Biblical Stewardship)

- Read Luke 16:1-13
 - What is most valued by the master in this parable?
 - What do we learn from this passage about Biblical Stewardship? (*that the impact we can make for eternity is what God values far more*)
- Read Luke 12:13-21
 - What is most frightening for you about this parable?
 - What does it mean to be rich towards God?
 - How can someone be so wise and successful in the eyes of the world (worldly stewardship) but such a failure when it comes to Biblical Stewardship?

Exploring how to apply all of this

- What are the reasons we might struggle to relinquishing ownership of things and embrace stewardship?
- How does the Cross of Jesus begin to change our thinking over who owns what in our lives?
- How does God's love for us excite and move us to embrace stewardship?
- In what area of stewardship do you struggle the most? (see list above)
- From this study and from the talk on Sunday, how has the Holy Spirit been encouraging you in regards to pursuing Biblical stewardship?
- What would you love to see more of in your life in this regard?

For our prayers:

You may wish to have your group ponder the following and use it to stimulate a time of fruitful and earnest prayer. *"Lord this day is yours, this money is yours this body is yours, these possessions and abilities in my life in Jesus are yours. You've generously entrusted them to me. How might I use these things this day to honour you and your purposes, knowing that this pursuit will protect me from waste and futility and enable me all the more to experience the fullness of joy?"*

- Confess: our wayward stewardship
- Give praise for such a generous and forgiving owner who gives us Jesus.
- Call upon God to make the most of what he has given us for His great purposes.

GROWING STEWARDS OF GOD'S BELONGINGS



Entrusted by God and for God (part 2)

Leader Prep – background/reminders

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- Yet the stewardship of money and possessions remains one of the last areas of our lives to be 'converted'. Statistics continue to show people both give less than they think they do, and share less than they want to. E.g. on average in the US evangelicals give 2.5% of their income away (still higher though than most in the west).

Big Idea: This world belongs to God and so do we. We have the honour of being entrusted with His possessions for our joy and His ultimate glory.

Possible opening/s

- How would you respond to the following? What would you affirm, and what worries you?
 - Some people give their money, but I give my time and skills to the things of God.
 - Only when we actually trust God and let go of our money will we discover the fullness of His blessings for us this side of eternity.

- o The single greatest threat to our spiritual health is not our material poverty, but our material prosperity.
- o The only safe thing we can say in regards to giving, is that we should give more than we can afford. (C.S.Lewis reflecting on Luke:21:1-4)
- o If I wanted to destroy a nation, I would give it too much, and I would have it on its knees, miserable, greedy, sick. (John Steinbeck, Washington Post, 1960)
- Why are most people so *touchy* about money?
- Why are most people so *worried* about money?
- Why are we?
- How have you been challenged / encouraged in regards to giving during our stewardship series?

Getting into the text – (maybe split up into smaller groups and report back)

What do the following passages have to say to us about the issues of money and giving?

Matthew 19:16-30

- What can't the man in this passage see?
- What is the warning to us?

Matthew 6:19-34

- Where is Jesus trying to focus our attention?
- What is the connection between money and worry?

1 Timothy 6:17-21

- Why is this such a strong warning?
- How do we try and get out of this?

(Come together again to read through this key passage)

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 & 9:6-8

- What can we say about giving from this passage?
- What is Paul's motive? (*Their blessing*)
- What is it about the gospel that moves people to give generously? (*see 8:9...the driver for our giving*)
- What benefits to giving does Paul outline?

Exploring how to apply all of this

- Confession time: What are the roadblocks in your life/heart that stops you pursuing all the more the life of generosity modeled in the Scriptures? What steps do we need to take to trust God all the more in this area?
- Can you share a moment in life when your generosity actually brought you great blessing... i.e. living off less became more?
- Why do we struggle to take the New Testament's warnings seriously when it comes to our money?
- I would rather live off 90% or less of my income and have God's blessing, than live off 100% without it. What do you like about this statement? What worries you about it?

For our prayers: some suggestions

That we'd take the Scriptures seriously and trust God in the pursuit of eternal treasures, not just the temporal
 That we'd be moved to put into practice a life of giving that reflects in thanks the riches we have in the gospel.
 That those amongst us in great need would be loved and supported by those with plenty.
 That we'd enjoy the blessings of living a life of generosity, and see how God will bring us great benefit as a result...both now and eternally.